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ABSTRACT

The role and status of English and English instruction in Kuwait are summarized. English is taught as a compulsory subject in intermediate and secondary schools and is a medium of instruction at the university level. English plays an important role in Kuwait's education, science, technology, and commerce. The status of English instruction within the educational system, the Inspectorate of English, teacher supply, instructional materials, administration and planning of English instruction, English training outside the educational system, the British role in English instruction, and commercial opportunities for language courses in Kuwait are discussed. (RW)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: Kuwait

Date: September 1983

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

Arabic is the official language of Kuwait, but English is the main second language used there and plays an important role in education, commerce, science and technology. English is taught as a compulsory subject in intermediate and secondary schools, and is the medium of instruction in the Science, Engineering and Medical Faculties of Kuwait University. Many promising young Kuwaitis still go abroad for higher education and, with over 50% of these choosing universities in the English-speaking world, a good knowledge of English is considered essential for academic advancement.

There are two English language daily newspapers, carrying mainly agency reports. Thirty five per cent of the total number of hours of television broadcast are of 'foreign' origin, the majority in English with Arabic subtitles. There is also one radio channel which broadcasts in English, but most of its output is given over to non-stop stereo music. Few people read books in English, except for academic purposes, and there are no local authors of any consequence writing in English.

English serves as a lingua franca for the non-Arab expatriates in Kuwait, who comprise about six per cent of the population and come mainly from the Indian subcontinent. It is also the language used for most business contacts between Kuwaitis and non-Arabic speakers, and is important in financial institutions with international contacts. Normal local, as well as international, banking procedures can be carried out in English or Arabic. Because of Kuwait's increasing importance as one of the richest countries in the world (in terms

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of per capita GNP), as a massive petroleum exporter and increasingly as a financial centre, good English is a pre-requisite for managers in commercial and financial institutions, as well as in the oil industry. English is used for necessary outside contacts in public administration and some government publications, for example the Annual Statistical Abstract, are printed in both Arabic and English. Middle-level civil servants (mostly expatriate Arabs) often speak good English, many of them having studied abroad. The standard of English among senior civil servants (mostly Kuwaitis) is more variable. English is much in evidence on the streets of Kuwait City: all major road signs and shop signs are written in both Arabic and English, and the packaging on the vast quantities of imported goods is usually printed in both languages.

2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The State School System

There is no teaching of English at the pre-primary (ages 4-6) and primary (ages 7-10) levels. All pupils begin English as a compulsory subject on entering intermediate school at the age of eleven. The syllabus comes under the central control of the Ministry of Education, and all pupils are currently following the Oxford University Press Crescent Course books 1-4.

Considerable importance is attached to English as a subject. Pupils study it for five periods a week in the first two years of intermediate school, and for six periods a week in the third and fourth years. Periods are forty-five minutes long in winter, forty minutes in summer. The pupils' progress is monitored by both continuous assessment and end-of-year exams. These exams are produced individually either by class teachers or by schools.

In secondary school all pupils follow a general course for two years, during which they study eight periods of English per week in the first year, and seven per week in the second year. During their final two years they specialise in either arts or sciences; those entering the arts system study English eight periods a week for their remaining two years in secondary school, while those in the science stream have English for only seven periods a week. All pupils continue to use the Crescent Course, and no particular effort is made towards subject-specified English. There is no teaching of English literature in Kuwaiti secondary schools.

As in the intermediate schools, the pupils' progress is monitored by both continuous assessment and regular examinations. In four experimental secondary schools which use the unit/credit system, 50% of a pupil's overall mark is taken from his continuous assessment grades, and 50% from his performance in examinations, as compared to 25% from continuous assessment and 75% by examination in the ordinary schools. In 1983 the British Council participated in a seminar for teachers, with the aim of helping them to develop communicative tests appropriate to the communicative basis of the Crescent Course.

Post-Secondary and Vocational

English is taught in all five post-secondary technical and vocational institutes run by the Department of Technical and Vocational Education in the new Public Authority for Applied Education and Training.

i. Kuwait Business Institute (KBI) offers courses for men and women in accountacy, secretarial skills, materials management and related subjects. One subject (computing) is officially taught through the medium of English, but in practice Arabic is often used. There are courses in English shorthand and typing. As in the University (see below) all students must take three compulsory skills courses in English. There is also a remedial course for those who do not pass the initial English test. Teachers are currently using Kernel Lessons Intermediate for the remedial (non-credit) course, and Kernel Lessons Plus for the "advanced" credit-earning General English course. A new set of materials designed by the British Council will be phased in for the two ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses of the following Departments during 1983-85: Medical Secretaries, Computer, Business and Postal.

ii. Kuwait Institute of Applied Technology (KIAT): teaches all subjects in English except construction engineering. All the students (men only) follow English courses produced under the Council's ESP materials contract (1980-82).

iii. The Health Institute offers courses for women in nursing, food science and environmental health. Although nursing is the only subject taught through the medium of English, all students have to follow at least one compulsory English course.

iv. Men's Teacher Training College.

and

v. Women's Teacher Training College: in both these institutes English is a compulsory subject, but since they are principally involved in training primary school teachers who do not need to teach English, the subject is not of great importance.

Kuwait University

Entrance requirements: the University Council decides the numbers of students to be enrolled from among Kuwaitis, Arab citizens and foreigners who have obtained their secondary school certificate or its equivalent. Entry requirements vary from faculty to faculty and, although no particular level of English is necessary for entrants, those who fail a faculty's English placement test are required to take remedial courses before commencing ESP.

The Language Centre was established during the academic year 1973-4. It is responsible for the teaching of all foreign language courses taught in the University; most of the teaching is of English. Foreign language courses are obligatory, and comprise part of the general university requirements for graduation. All students are required to take three obligatory English language credit courses in addition to any remedial course they may have needed to gain entry to the first credit course, as a result of their performance in the placement test. The remedial course may be 5-15 hours per week. This means that every student who graduates will have had a minimum of 3 x 5 x 15 = 225 hours of English in addition to any remedial or elective courses he or she may have taken.

A language unit is attached to each faculty under the direction of a supervisor. Courses in the medicine, science and engineering faculties now use materials specifically written for students of that faculty, concentrating on the appropriate study skills. The Medical Faculty has its own administratively separate language unit, and the students follow an intensive English programme for their first three semesters of study.

Department of English Language and Literature was opened at the foundation of Kuwait University in 1966, and provides courses for those majoring in English language and literature. There are currently thirty-one faculty members, seventeen language instructors and 950 students enrolled in the Department.

The emphasis in the first two years of the course of study is on language work, which takes up over 80% of the students' time. The third and fourth years concentrate on literature and linguistics. Details of the curriculum and course requirements are available from the British Council.

Private Schools

Approximately 18% of the total school population is enrolled in private schools, under the supervision of the Private Schools Department of the Ministry of Education. Among these are several English-medium schools, some catering almost exclusively for British or American children, while others attract a large proportion of Arab and other children whose parents want them to be educated in an English-speaking environment. Many of the teachers in these schools are native speakers using mother-tongue rather than English as a Foreign Language (EFL) methods in their teaching.

Teacher Training

Pre-service training is provided in the Men's and Women's Teacher Training Colleges for Primary School teachers (see above). Intermediate and secondary school teachers of English are, almost without exception, non-Kuwaiti nationals and have therefore been trained in their own countries, principally Egypt, Jordan and Palestine. There are great variations between teachers in both their level of English proficiency and their standard of teaching, although traditional methods still predominate.

The Inspectorate

There are forty-four inspectors of English, divided into four groups each under a senior inspector; they cover secondary schools, intermediate schools and private schools in Kuwait City and the Ahmadi area. The whole Inspectorate, headed by a Chief Inspector, has a wide range of responsibilities in addition to the regular inspection of English teaching. These include:

Teacher training: this year they have run an orientation course for new teachers, language improvement courses for older teachers, workshops for senior teachers on the Crescent materials, a seminar on testing, and a two-week course on language laboratories.

Curriculum development: members of the Inspectorate sit on planning committees in the Ministry of Education, and are involved in writing experimental materials for the unit/credit system schools, and in the analysis and improvement of examinations.

Information: the inspectors select and reproduce articles from English Language Teaching (ELT) journals for circulation among senior teachers under the title of ELT Inspectors' Selections, and also produce a regular information sheet for the information of the inspectors themselves. They have recently organised two competitions for pupils learning English, one for free reading and the other for wall magazines.

Outside contacts: members of the inspectorate attend international conferences in the field of ELT and are also involved with the programmes of visiting ELT experts, including those who come under Council auspices.

Non-Formal and Adult Education

Apart from the private language schools (see Section 7) and the British Council's Centre of English Studies (see Section 8), the main source of ELT for those wanting to study informally is the University's Centre of Community Service and Continuing Education. This operates in the evenings, using the facilities and many of the teachers from the Language Centre. The programmes they offer are heavily subsidized, enabling them to pay high rates to attract the best teachers, while at the same time keeping fees to a minimum.

English by Radio and Television

There are no programmes for learning English by television in Kuwait. The BBC English by Radio course Let's Speak English is broadcast on the Arabic service of Kuwait radio.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

Of the 2,500 English-teachers in schools in Kuwait less than 10% are Kuwaitis, and these are mainly women teaching English in the intermediate schools. In the schools, and in vocational education, most of the teachers come from other Arab countries with a few from the Indian subcontinent. At the University Language Centre there are approximately thirty British teachers (of whom fourteen are currently British Council-recruited), the rest - approximately one hundred - being Americans and Arabs of various nationalities.

The Kuwait government has no difficulty in recruiting as many teachers as it needs from the poorer Arab countries, since they are easily attracted by the relatively high salaries offered. They have had all types of training, but most have a BA from an Arab university, and less than 10% are graduates from teacher training colleges. The only provision for in-service training is that provided by the Inspectorate, and since the suppression of the British Council's English Language Officer post there has been considerably less British involvement in seminars and courses for teachers.

4. TEACHING MATERIALS

All secondary and intermediate schools in Kuwait are now using the OUP Crescent course, and they are adequately supplied with materials. In the four (next year, six) schools using the experimental unit/credit system pupils follow Crescent for the compulsory courses, but ESP type materials are being developed for some of the elective courses.

About half the eighty or so secondary schools are equipped with language laboratories, and the inspectors are currently involved in organizing courses to encourage teachers to make better use of these facilities.

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PE Department
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General Inspectorate
Special Education Department
Religious Institute
KG Departments
Elementary Education Department
Intermediate Education Department
Secondary Education Department
Asst Undersecretary Planning & Cultural Affairs
School Libraries Department
Cultural Relations Department
Scholarships Department
Teaching Aids Department
Curriculum & School Books Department
Planning Department

It is not proposed to install laboratories in schools which do not have them. In general the available teaching-aids-hardware is under-utilized because of the lack of appropriate software and/or appropriate training among the teachers.

5. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

Education in Kuwait is centrally administered by the Ministry of Education. The chart shows the structure of the Ministry.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

For a general outline of the education system, its traditions and development, the reader should refer to the British Council's Education Profile. The key body in planning the teaching of English is the Inspectorate which has access, through participation in advisory and planning committees, directly to the Under-Secretary at the Ministry. Developments are monitored by the Curriculum Research Centre, whose Director reports directly to the Minister of Education and advises him on curriculum matters. There are three full-time staff in the English section of the Centre.

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

A number of industrial concerns and government departments have English language training programmes:

Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) has its own ELT centre, managed by International Language Centres (ILC) with UK-recruited staff.

The Ministry of Defence has a similar contract with ILC to run language courses, using a rigidly-programmed American course. ILC has a total of seventy-five staff working in Kuwait at KOC and the Ministry of Defence.

The Commercial Bank has its own in-house ELT service with a British director.

Some companies, such as the Kuwait National Petroleum Company, Petrochemical Industries, the Central Bank and United Arab Shipping, send their employees to the Council's Centre of English Studies (CES) for ELT. Some companies also send their employees overseas on language courses.

Kuwait Airways Corporation is currently setting up its own ESP in-house programme with overall monitoring and advisory services from the British Council. The Council is currently (April 1983) recruiting a team of three to design, plan and implement the programme.

There are about ten locally-based private language schools, of which the Kuwait/Salmiya Education Centre is the longest established; none of the others are of any great size, influence or permanence.

There are several English-medium schools in Kuwait, catering for expatriates from both the English-speaking and non-English-speaking worlds. The largest is the New English School, which has 2,000 pupils and follows a British curriculum leading to GCE 'O' and 'A' levels.

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Council-Recruited Teaching Staff

There are currently fourteen Council-recruited language instructors at the Kuwait University Language Centre (KULC - see Section 2). The headteacher of the New English School has a Council-guaranteed contract. Three English teaching staff are being recruited for the Kuwait Airways Corporation (see Section 7).

The British Council Centre of English Studies (CES)

The CES occupies the same building as the British Council office and library, a converted villa in Mansouriah, an inner suburb of Kuwait City. Currently four full-time and thirty-three part-time teachers offer general English to 780 students in sixty-two classes, and some fifty students on ESP courses. Recent policy decisions emphasise a move away from general purpose English towards more English for Specific Groups, and this new approach is likely to be reflected in staffing, structure and student numbers over the next couple of years. There are no literature classes at the CES but students are offered membership of the British Council library at a concessionary rate; there are currently 260 student members. Students also have the advantage of being able to see the monthly feature film shown on the Council premises, and any exhibitions which are held there.

Language and Literature Conferences

None.

British Teaching Materials

The Crescent Course (OUP) used in Kuwaiti schools is of course British in origin, as are most of the other English teaching books available. There are no locally published English teaching materials.

9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

No official support. There are about seventy instructors at KULC recruited directly from the US.

10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

None.

11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

With its population of only 1.5 million Kuwait will never be a large market for paid educational services. Nevertheless there is a steady market for ELT books, software and language tuition among the sectors of the population seeking advancement through education, particularly among non-Kuwaiti Arabs and people from the Indian sub-continent.

With Kuwait's great wealth and drive to diversify away from oil there is currently heavy investment in industry, especially petrochemicals, and in port development. With so much capital invested in plant, it could be assumed that there would be a related investment in manpower development and training. This in turn should generate a big demand for English language training, especially occupation-related ESP. Undoubtedly there is a large potential market in this field, but as yet it has remained largely untapped, the main obstacle being the apparent reluctance of senior management in industrial concerns and the government to see the importance and relevance of ELT to their training requirements. There is work to be done, explaining why English language training is necessary, before the market will open up.

There is probably room to expand the market for language courses in the UK, especially summer schools, since many Kuwaitis anyway spend the hottest months of the summer in Britain or Europe. Again, however, it is a question of persuading them that they need English language tuition.

There could be an extensive market for audio-visual aids, supplementary readers, computer-assisted language learning software, but there must be a corresponding training programme for teachers, to support any new methods or materials introduced.

The opportunities for UK or foreign language schools establishing branches in Kuwait are not as attractive as might be imagined, since all foreign schools must have a Kuwaiti sponsor who has majority ownership. The activities of any school would be subject to government regulations on fee levels, premises, class size, segregation, accounting and academic standards, and it would be liable to inspection by the Private Education Department at any time.

12. CREATIVE WRITING

There is no creative writing in English in Kuwait.

13. CURRENT RESEARCH

Most of the educational research in Kuwait is undertaken by the Curriculum Research Centre. The English Department there has currently only two members of staff, and is concerned mainly with assessing the effectiveness of the Crescent course materials in teaching communicative skills to the pupils. In 1982-83 this research was centred on the intermediate schools, and in 1983-84 they will look at the secondary schools.

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES OF FURTHER EDUCATION

The following periodicals published in Kuwait are of interest:

Instructional Technology, published twice a year by the Arab States Educational Technology Centre, PO Box 24017, Safat, Kuwait under the auspices of the Arab League Educational Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO), carries articles about the use of new technology in ELT.

Al Manakh, Language Centre Journal, PO Box 5486, University of Kuwait, published twice a year (publication temporarily suspended) carries articles about ESP in Kuwait, and covers developments at the Language Centre.

Published outside Kuwait:

Middle East Education, published six times a year by International Trade Publications Ltd, Queensway House, 2 Queensway, Redhill, Surrey.

The following individual articles:

Hajjaj, Ali, Abstract of Changing Trends in ELT in Kuwait, in IATEFL Newsletter, No 51, January 1978.

Hajjaj. Ali Recent Trends in Educational Media for ELT in Kuwait, in Programmed Learning and Educational Technology, Vol 15, No 1, February 1978.

Kharma, Nayef The Teaching of English in Kuwait, in English Language Teaching Journal, Vol 21, No 3, 1967

Kharma, Nayef Children and the Language Lab - an Experiment in Kuwait, in English Language Teaching Journal, Vol 26, No 2. February 1972, includes a brief review of ELT in Kuwait in 1972.

Kharma, Nayef Motivation and the Young Foreign-Language Learner, in English Language Teaching Journal, Vol 31, No 2, 1977.

15. GENERAL STATEMENT

There is a growing need for English language teaching in Kuwait, since the language is of such importance in business, education, science and technology, and serves as a lingua franca among the cosmopolitan inhabitants of the country. The great wealth of Kuwait means that adequate resources can be made available for developments, such as the introduction of the Crescent course, the setting up of the Language Centre at the University and comprehensive training programmes in industry. There is already a well-established infra-structure to promote the development of ELT, notably the Inspectorate, the Curriculum Research Centre and the new Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. It is generally held that a good knowledge of English is an essential skill for advancement in most professions and occupations.

Against this must be weighed an understandable reaction that Arabic should not be usurped as the national language, a feeling which has recently received new impetus from the resurgence of fundamentalist Islam and the government's overall policy of "Kuwaiti-isation". Possibly because of this, there is a lack of clarity in formulating needs and objectives in language training

outside the education system while, both in schools and elsewhere, the attitude still prevails that learning a language is an academic exercise rather than training in a skill. Paradoxically, there are also financial constraints on funding specially designed ELT programmes, as authorities (with a few exceptions, such as KAC) do not discriminate between such programmes and cheaper language training, usually of an inferior kind.

On balance it could be said that ELT in Kuwait is growing in both quality and quantity, but has a long way to go before reaching the limits of improvement which could be achieved given the potential resources available.